

CLYDE FITZGERALD

Summary: Clyde Fitzgerald, President of the ILA, speaks about his experience working at the waterfront. He talks about the different people in a gang, how containerization came to be very important for Houston, container royalty and how automation is slowly phasing out the workforce.

00.23

Betsy Peterson, Sept 09, 2011

District offices of ILA, Webster, TX

00.50

Born in Lovelady, TX. Moved to Houston at 3. Father and two uncles worked on the docks. All three were longshoreman. One uncle worked on the vessel while father and the other uncle worked on the terminal. Terminal longshoreman work on the dock delivering and receiving cargo once it is on and off the vessel. Then warehouse longshoreman deliver it by truck or rail to the customer. Terminal longshoreman different labor union. Started working at docks at 16. worked on docks for 6-7 years. Then became foreman, dock/walking foreman and then President of Local in 1969.

06.00

worked on docks throwing bags, drums of oil, bales of cotton. All handled by hand. In the warehouse, Walking foreman could have up to 25 men gangs working at any dock. 5 men in a gang, one driver, one fork lift operator, 4 men that loaded the pallets. Cotton Squeezers. Machine to load and unload cotton.

8.39

Cotton paid more money on ship only. in warehouse worked cotton by the hourly rate. Was not piece work. Fork lift operator was normally the gang foreman. Walking foreman was above everybody.

10.22

peers and relatives encouraged CF to run for office. Ran for recording secretary and got elected. Served one term for two years. Decided to run for President. Elected positions - President, VP. Business agent, recording secretary, 5 person exec board. Only two full time jobs - President and business agent.

11.54

Business agent and President shared and received orders from the Board and would do the hiring. Alternated the jobs. Negotiated contracts. President is the chief negotiator for the local. Would have contract committee people be elected to negotiate. District is above all local unions in that particular district.

13.14

Negotiate contracts for whole district Moorhead City, NC to Brownsville, TX. Master contract is negotiated by the international and all locals participate. Contract committee present proposals, present it to employers and then negotiate it together. Always been handled at an international level, more so after containerization. Master fully automated contract. Almost impossible to have a national contract on break bulk (loose cargo, steel, cars etc).

15.33

Port of Houston big on containerization. Break bulk cargo in Houston - Steel. Don't handle oil at port. Done only at terminals and at refineries. Once barreled, then would be loaded.

17.14

First container ship came to Houston in 1956. Sea Land, first big container carrier. 1969 container revolution. 105 day strike, tried to win a contract to stuff and strip a container on the pier instead of outsourcing stuffing and stripping. Won the contract but later ruled by Fed Maritime commission as illegal. 50 mile rule - any cargo going within a 50 mile radius of the port had to be stuffed and stripped on the dock.

19.50

Non-union started in 1986. Back then, not unusual to be on strike once every 2 years. When on strike nothing worked, everything stopped. Went a few weeks without pay, when strike was over, ships were waiting to be unloaded, didn't go anywhere else, were just waiting. Ships just backed up. Worked day and night to catch up. 105 day strike New York went back to work after 54 days, Jacksonville, FL and Houston were two ports in the ILA that stayed on strike for 105 days.

23.30

Containers go directly to customers facility. Lost many jobs. Jobs all now skilled. Better wages and benefits through containerizations. Locals grew because automation allowed an increase in cargo coming in. Warehouse and terminal side has grown but longshoreman numbers have dropped but better jobs. They didn't drop just didn't increase much.

If 50 mile radius could have been maintained there would have been more loading and stripping on dock than there is now.

27.54

Non union mostly tramp ships - customer charters a vessel and move cargo on it. No carrier to have a relationship with like with container carriers. on rail most of the containers come from west container. Quicker to get it there by ship. Can get container to Chicago from west in three days. Panama canal will change that. Lot of cargo from ASia

will go to the east coast and gulf through the canal. Before containerization 200 longshoreman work day and night to unload for two weeks or longer. Today 100 longshoreman can do it in 12-20 hours.

32.00

Back then no training, learnt on our own. Got on machine during lunch hour and fiddled around. Today, training in contract and employees pay to train. Give older longshoreman a fair chance to learn. Computers fit in with clerks and checkers. Eliminated few clerks and checkers jobs. OCR. Where there used to be a clerk writing contents of the box, scanners and bar codes do the job now. Some terminals in Europe that are all computerized. Very few people loading and unloading. Computers running the machinery. 4-5 people operating machinery when there used to be a 100 men. Built a fully automated terminal in Virginia 6 yrs. ago. Came in to Mobile, Alabama and built a container terminal the old fashioned way after Virginia. Building a terminal in Jacksonville, FL that is fully automated. Fully automated terminal allows use of land where boxes can be moved in and out much quicker. Automation allows to not have too many people on the dock. so no threat of getting run over and killed. Barbers Cut - 60, 70 people running RTGs (cranes) loading and unloading trucks. Jacksonville terminal designed to do same job with 7 people up in a tower controlling machine to load and unload. Hope to not get knocked out because of sheer volume of containers coming in.

Have trained Virginia and Jacksonville and now Houston, to run and program machines. Any job in the terminal in Jacksonville, FL would be ILA. Computers, programming etc all ILA jobs.

41.44

Container royalty rewarded to compensate for loss of jobs. District office was integrated long before local unions because they wanted to make sure every group had representation. Each group had own set of rules and own qualifications for seniority. Had to work through all of that. Judge made final decision.

48.05

Made sure to keep equal number of foreman. No problem regarding segregation. Managed to work through all of that. Was elected first president of the merged local on an interim basis. Everybody was represented fairly and it was successful.

51.15

Social side. ILA sponsored teams. Would join other leagues. Labor Day picnic. Did not do too much back then. Last 10-11 years have been very involved with Labor Day.

53.15

Watched and learnt on the job. Advice to new people coming in. " We have a good thing going here, so make sure to keep that going." Majority of the workforce appreciates the port. Have not had a strike at the port since 1974.

56.00

Non union companies pay a lot less. in the turning basin where break bulk cargo is. making less money today than in 1986. In order to compete for cargo. Non union has devastated wages and benefits.